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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KCOR](#) [BF](#)
SUBJECT: INGRAHAM AND FREE NATIONAL MOVEMENT WIN BAHAMIAN
ELECTION

REF: A. NASSAU 414

- [1](#)B. NASSAU 435
- [1](#)C. NASSAU 516
- [1](#)D. NASSAU 550
- [1](#)E. NASSAU 551

Cassified By: Charge d'Affaires Brent Hardt for reaons 1.4(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: According to still unofficial counts, The Free National Movement (FNM) captured 24 of 41 parliamentary seats in Bahamian elections May 2. Hubert Ingraham, who served as Prime Minister from 1992-2002, returns to office and is expected to name his cabinet in the coming week. Despite running with the advantages of incumbency, a strong economy, and freshly cut electoral district boundaries, the PLP became the first Bahamian political party not to win a second term in office. Strong FNM organization, a growing middle class, high-profile government scandals, and widespread concerns about poor and inefficient governance proved the keys to the FNM's victory in a close election. The FNM also rallied on the strength of Ingraham's decisive personality, a characteristic that will make him a good U.S. partner. We expect the FNM to abandon the PLP's embrace of Cuba, possibly downgrading the Embassy in Havana to a consulate. A pragmatic Ingraham will be less sympathetic to non-aligned positions, more skeptical of Venezuela, and less focused on CARICOM group positions. In contrast to outgoing PM Christie, Ingraham will be willing to make commitments and follow through on them. END SUMMARY.

FNM WINS 24 SEATS, HUBERT INGRAHAM TO LEAD COUNTRY

[1](#)2. (U) According to unofficial election results, the FNM captured 24 of 41 parliamentary seats in the May 2 national election. Official results will be released the evening of May 3, but outgoing Prime Minister Perry Christie has conceded the election. The race was the closest in decades, and the Progressive Liberal Party (PLP) is well positioned to be a strong opposition in Parliament. Based on Post's limited election day monitoring, balloting appeared to be conducted freely, fairly, and without violence. However, several recounts are ongoing and some results in close races may be contested.

[1](#)3. (U) The leader of the FNM, former Prime Minister Hubert Ingraham, will again become Prime Minister. FNM leaders are

meeting today to begin deciding cabinet appointments. The current Governor General will swear in the new PM as soon as the election results become official, and will swear in the new Cabinet within the next 10 days. Parliament will officially open with the new parliamentarians sworn in on May 123. It had been expected that former Bahamian Ambassador to Washington Joshua Sears would be tapped as Foreign Minister, however, Sears lost his race for Parliament. Should Ingraham decide to appoint Sears to the Senate, he could still be named that post.

ELECTION TURNED ON DEMOGRAPHICS, SCANDAL AND LEADERSHIP

14. (C) The PLP held many advantages going into elections. It was a well-financed incumbent, held 29 of the 40 seats in parliament, and boasted of a strong economy, job growth, and billions of dollars in new investments. However, the PLP made a tactical error by focusing the election on the personalities of the two party leaders. Unlike former Prime Minister Christie, Ingraham is decisive -- so much so that many blamed the FNM's 2002 election defeat on "Hubbigety" Ingraham's imperial attitude. By focusing on personality, the PLP allowed the FNM to hammer away at the themes of trust and efficiency. Hubert Ingraham, also known as "The Delivery Boy," is famous for his blunt honesty and his ability to deliver on his promises. This contrasted favorably for voters with Christie's reputation for tardiness, lack of control over his Ministers, and inability to make tough decisions. The PLP's campaign theme -- "So Said, So Done" -- only served to highlight its own lack of action on outstanding electoral promises. The FNM's theme -- "It's About Trust" -- resonated with a populace frustrated by Christie's scandal-plagued MPs, and the FNM buttressed this theme with pledges of open government and anti-corruption

legislation (reftels C, D).

15. (C) The FNM's victory came also from its superior party organization. In a 2005 conversation with the Charge', PLP Chairman Raynard Rigby had praised Ingraham's skills as a grassroots campaign organizer and predicted a tough fight for the PLP if Ingraham resumed party leadership. Rigby's prediction came true, as the FNM's party machinery was the driving force during the election. FNM constituency workers were electronically connected to headquarters and its detailed electronic maps and databases, with clear plans for house to house outreach and a unified approach to national advertising. Even on election day, FNM election workers coordinated like cogs in a well-oiled national machine while PLP workers labored, constituency by constituency, with little evident coordination. In a pre-election meeting, Ingraham told the Embassy that Christie was a likable man and gifted speaker, but he was the last person you would want to organize a government. The Prime Minister's office was notorious inside and outside the government for its inefficiency and disorder. The PLP's inability to organize itself effectively for the election clearly flowed from the top. In fact, Christie's indecisiveness kept him from calling an early election, when the FNM was in leadership crisis and Ingraham still had one foot in retirement. Instead he waited until the last possible moment and thereby allowed Ingraham and the FNM the maximum time to get their feared organizational machinery in gear.

16. (C) Demographic shifts also played a key role in the election. Traditional PLP seats in the low-income center of New Providence and traditional FNM seats on the beachfronts were fairly secure for each party. However, as The Bahamas has developed and as income and education levels have risen, constituents have moved from the traditional PLP areas into new middle-class areas. This shift has expanded the potential FNM base and eroded traditional loyalty to the PLP as the party of independence among those who view the FNM agenda as better suited to middle-class sensibilities. As a result, the FNM took most of the battleground districts with mixed constituencies. Another key demographic change was the large increase in young and first-time voters who are less

tolerant of traditional Caribbean handout politics and want their representatives to deliver good governance.

¶7. (C) In fact, perceptions of poor PLP performance in government dogged PLP candidates on the hustings. While the FNM candidates discussed their plans to develop local government and improve services, the PLP candidates were forced to defend their sketchy record. In many cases, constituents were fed up with poor trash collection, bad roads, and perceived indifference of the parliamentary representatives to their concerns.

¶8. (C) These three winning factors -- demographic shifts, national party organization and a focus on good governance -- framed an election of differing campaign styles and parties with differing core values. The PLP is still the party of Lynden Pindling, the father of Bahamian independence whose later years were tarnished by allegations of drug-related corruption. Rooted in the working-class neighborhoods of The Bahamas and quick to evoke issue of race, it continued to campaign in the Pindling era style of perks and kickbacks for constituents (reftel D). The FNM victory reflects a politically maturing Bahamas, focused on modern governance and a more integrated, national approach to politics that clearly attracted younger and middle-class voters towards the party.

FOREIGN POLICY TO BE NATIONALISTIC, PRAGMATIC AND COOPERATIVE

¶9. (C) We can expect Ingraham to move decisively on several key issues of concern to the United States. During conversations with Ingraham leading up to elections (reftel A), Ingraham promised to work closely with the FAA to resolve concerns over the previous government's desire to assume control of the Bahamian Flight Information Region (FIR). He will welcome continued close law enforcement cooperation with the U.S. to combat drug flows and illegal migration. We will seek to enlist his support early to conclude a Proliferation Security Initiative agreement (long delayed under the PLP)

and to improve airport security. Ingraham's serious, pragmatic approach, proven track record of cooperation with the U.S., and ability to move quickly on issues when needed should strengthen an already close relationship.

¶10. (C) Compared to Christie, Ingraham's foreign policy will likely be less multilateralist and more nationalistic. Ingraham has been critical of the PLP's closeness to Cuba, and he indicated to us that he would downgrade relations with Cuba if elected from an embassy to a consulate. His government is also likely to be more skeptical of Venezuela, the Non-Aligned Movement and CARICOM than the PLP. Ingraham is a strong nationalist whose criticism of foreigners purchasing Bahamian land struck a chord with voters. His criticism (ref A) of the U.S. arrest and prosecution of Bahamian-born airport workers caught smuggling drugs because he felt they should have been prosecuted in Bahamian courts also reflects this nationalistic streak. While Ingraham will not hesitate to stand up for Bahamian national priorities, he has worked closely with the U.S. in the past and we expect he will move quickly to ensure a close and cooperative relationship with his country's most vital diplomatic partner.
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